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# **Language teacher education for learner autonomy: the empowering potential of case pedagogy**

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Although discourses advocating autonomy pervade current educational research and policies, teaching practices are often alien to theoretical proposals and policy recommendations. This mismatch can be explained by historical and structural factors, one of them being that teacher education has often represented a disempowering space where teachers are expected to assimilate and apply academic knowledge, rather than inquire into and explore their own practices. As a result, teacher education programmes may fail to promote educational change towards autonomy. (Jiménez Raya & Vieira, in press)

# Teacher education for autonomy: what does it entail?

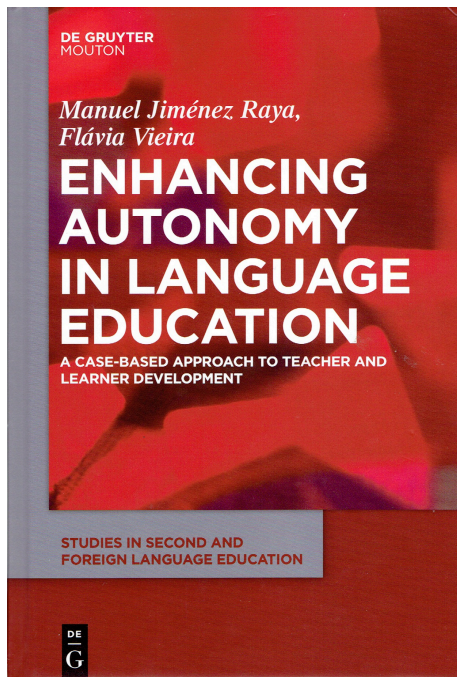
- An ideal vision of education as empowerment and transformation where teachers act as critical intellectuals and agents of change (Freire, 1986; Giroux, 2013; Kincheloe, 2003; Smyth, 1987)
- A critical view of education as it is, so as to envision possibilities (what it *can be*) and explore the interspace between reality ideals (Jiménez Raya & Vieira, in press; Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, 2017)
- A belief in the power of experience in teacher education and in the transformative potential of an ‘epistemology of practice’ (Dewey, 1963, Schön, 1987)
- A view of teacher education as a ‘third space’ (Zeichner, 2010) and teacher educators as ‘third space professionals’ (Whitchurch, 2013)

# *Pedagogy of experience* in teacher education

(Dewey, 1963; Vieira, 2009, 2010; Jiménez Raya, Lamb & Vieira, 2017; Jiménez Raya & Vieira, in press)

- Promoting an epistemology of practice by focusing on professional reflection and action so as to enhance the theorisation of experience and the renewal of practice with a transformative purpose
- Using public theories to help teachers scrutinise and reconstruct personal professional knowledge (rejecting a theory-to-practice rationale)
- Favouring teachers' epistemological and situational autonomy to make decisions that are conceptually and ethically sound, locally valid, and socially relevant
- Enhancing teachers' ability to identify and resist constraints, and find spaces for manoeuvre → pedagogy for autonomy as a re(ide)alistic practice
- Understanding and enhancing teachers' professional knowledge and practice as situated, exploratory and transitional phenomena

A case-  
based  
approach



## TEACHER EDUCATORS WRITING CASES FROM TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE

### TEACHERS WRITING CASES FROM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE

- Exploring the interspace between reality and ideals → a re(ide)alistic approach
- Promoting an inquiry-based approach to teaching
- *Case analysis* for understanding PA (analysing professional narratives of autonomy-oriented experiences)
- *Case construction* for exploring and understanding PA (designing, implementing and narrating autonomy-oriented experiences)

To assert that a narrative is a *case* is to engage in an act of theory. (...) I do *not* mean that cases are, in themselves, inherently theoretical. Nor do I mean that the purpose of cases is to teach theory. Instead I am claiming that any story that can be called a case must be arguably a case *of* something. It must be seen as an exemplar of a class, an instance of a larger category.

For this reason, the key move made in teaching with cases occurs when instructor and students explore the question, “what is this a case of?”. As they wrestle with this question, they move the case in two directions simultaneously. They connect this narrative to their remembered (personal) experiences or to vicariously experienced cases written or recounted by others, thus relating this particular case to other specific cases. They also connect this narrative to categories of experience, to theoretical classifications through which they organise and make sense of their world. (Shulman, 2004: 474)

# Context

- 2-year Master degree programme for in-service language teachers (University of Minho, Portugal)
- Course on Language Education and Pedagogical Supervision (45h)
- Exploration of a pedagogy of experience (since 2003)
- Theoretical input on visions of language education and professional development, pedagogy for autonomy, collaborative supervision, and classroom-based inquiry.
- Case analysis (whole class) and case construction (groups)
- Inquiry-based approach to case development in schools
- Case narratives in case portfolios
- Participatory evaluation (professional learning & course quality)

# Approach to inquiry-based case construction

**Identifying pedagogical problems, dilemmas, interests... → Topic selection**

**Designing a small-scale, autonomy-oriented action research plan & materials (teacher educator's support)**

**Developing and evaluating the action research plan in one class (1 teacher per group)**

Knowing about students' previous experiences, attitudes and representations (within topic) → Implementing change by integrating the development of language and learning competences through a learner-centred approach focusing on dialogue, awareness of learning, self-regulation, and participatory assessment of teaching and learning → Collecting data (e.g. reflective records, questionnaires, self-regulation checklists and analysis of learner assignments) → Evaluating pedagogical change on the basis of personal understandings, classroom data, and theoretical input.

**Case writing: narrative of 15-20 pages in case portfolio (narrative + records of planning, data collection, out-of-class group meetings...)**

**Self-evaluation and course evaluation**

**Evaluation and feedback by teacher educator**

**Revising narratives for subsequent use in TE contexts (optional)**

# *Travelling in the interspace... PA as a pedagogy of possibility*

*corpus* of 6 narratives published in Vieira, 2014 (see Vieira, 2014, 2017; Jiménez Raya & Vieira, in press)

Teachers	Topic, focus & context	Main Strategies
A.C. Brandão, E. Monteiro, F. Alvim & L. Costa	Homework: making it more self-directed and creative (10 <sup>th</sup> grade class of 27 students)	Learner questionnaire about homework; Development of innovative homework tasks; Analysis of learner performance in homework tasks; Self/peer-assessment of homework tasks; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project
P. Ferreira, A. Precioso, C. Vilela, E. Barros & I. Azevedo	Reading: understanding difficulties and changing reading strategies (9 <sup>th</sup> grade class of 23 students)	Learner questionnaire about reading; Development of innovative reading tasks; Analysis of learner performance in reading tasks; Self-assessment of reading tasks; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project
M. Costa & M. Barreiro	Oral interaction: promoting the preparation of interaction and the use of communication strategies  (9 <sup>th</sup> grade class of 19 students)	Negotiation of role-play situation; Role-play task prepared by Ss; Self-assessment of communicative performance & strategies (pre/post task); Teacher observation of Ss' performance; Learner questionnaire on learner & teacher roles
S. Ferreira, L. Ribeiro & S. Pereira	Oral presentations: enhancing the preparation of oral presentations and learner involvement oral performance assessment  (9 <sup>th</sup> grade class of 19 students)	Learner questionnaire about problems felt in oral presentations; Raising awareness of preparation strategies and assessment criteria; Collaborative preparation of oral presentations; Self-assessment of oral performance; Comparison of learner and teacher assessments; Learner questionnaire to evaluate the project
A.C. Teixeira, A.I. Neves, H. Serdoura & I. Monteiro	Oral reading: enhancing expressive reading and learner self-confidence in oral reading	Raising awareness quality criteria in oral reading; Collaborative preparation of oral reading task (a play); Oral reading and self-assessment of reading performance (pre/post task); Dialogue about the project
A. Vasconcelos, I. Costa & P. Gonçalves	Cooperation: promoting cooperative learning  (9 <sup>th</sup> grade class of 21 students)	Learner questionnaire about collaborative work; Development of cooperative learning tasks; Learner self-assessment of cooperative learning tasks; Teachers' collaborative journal



## Enacting pedagogical change: an example – oral presentations (S. Ferreira et al.)

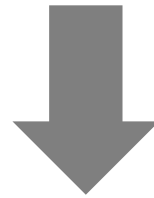
Teacher's routine prior to AR project	Renewed approach
T indicates 1 topic for the whole class	Ss choose one from 3 topics proposed by T
T proposes an outline for oral presentations and highlights useful language items (with Ss' collaboration)	T proposes an outline for oral presentations and highlights useful language items (with Ss' collaboration) T indicates/ suggests sources for topic search (websites)
T presents main criteria to assess oral presentations (e.g fluency)	T presents main criteria to assess oral presentations + simplified descriptors to clarify each criterion
Individual preparation of oral presentations	Collaborative preparation of oral presentation (in pairs)
Topic research and text writing outside class	Topic research outside class Collaborative text writing in class, using bilingual dictionaries
T's feedback to Ss' texts (through e-mail)	T's feedback to Ss' texts (through e-mail)
Training oral presentations outside class	Training oral presentations outside class Training oral presentations in class with no assessment (in pairs)
Individual presentations in class	Pair presentations in class Tape-recording of oral presentations
T assessment immediately after oral presentations in class	Pairs self-assess their presentation (self-assessment tool with criteria+descriptors) T assesses presentations in class and at home by listening to audiotapes Ss listen to audiotapes and revise previous self-assessment T and Ss compare their assessments and discuss future improvements

A more democratic approach:  
more explicit/ transparent,  
negotiated, cooperative,  
participatory, and reflective

## *What teachers' narratives tell us about teacher empowerment...*

- The starting point for inquiry is usually related to how teachers come to perceive mismatches between real practice and imagined practice
- Teachers interrogate established practices and explore alternative practices that they believe to be more in tune with humanistic and democratic values
- Teachers explore learner-centred approaches that amplify students' voice through pedagogical negotiation, metacognitive awareness, self-regulation, and joint evaluation of learning and teaching
- In promoting learner autonomy, teachers realise they enhance their own autonomy by interrogating mainstream teaching cultures, becoming more critical, and being more able to innovate and evaluate practice
- Pedagogical change is experienced, to a large extent, as a journey into the unknown which requires tolerance of uncertainty and an exploratory approach to pedagogy
- Writing is a method of (self)inquiry whereby Teachers' develop a 'language of experience' (Larrosa Bondía, 2010), a hybrid language that combines creativity and rigour and represents a 'third idiom' situated in-between professional and academic codes (Shor, 1992)

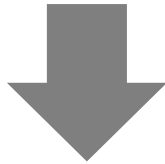
Awareness of the complexity of education  
Critical stance  
Resistance to constraints  
Agency & Inquiry  
Writing from experience



**A LEGACY OF CASES FOR OTHER TEACHERS TO REFLECT AND BUILD UPON**

## Case pedagogy: tensions and challenges

- Time-consuming
- Context-sensitive and exploratory
- Demanding for teachers and teacher educators
- Runs counter to mainstream teaching and TE cultures
- Teachers' projects are small-scale and isolated
- Learner autonomy is only briefly explored
- No follow-up assessment of impact



**NEED TO DEVELOP A SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHER EDUCATION**

# Educational experience and TE for autonomy as re(ide)alistic practices...

- Unique
- Uncertain
- Dilemmatic
- Ineffable
- Situated
- Value-laden
- Hybrid
- Transitory



Pedagogy as “the third margin of the river” (Nóvoa, 2011)

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